



# Forests

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## Guest Editorials

**Richard Wilson**

**Director of the California Department  
of Forestry and Fire Protection**

**Congressman Wally Herger**

## Interview

**Senator Tim Leslie**

## Feature Story

**Western Forests Need Action Now**

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# LAKE TAHOE ... THE PEARL IN PERIL!

Over the past decade, many of the forested areas in California, including the Lake Tahoe Basin, have sustained catastrophic losses due to drought, disease and insect infestation. As clearly evident in the photo above, tree mortality in excess of 80% of standing volume has been experienced in overstocked stands where past land use activities, successful fire suppression strategies, and failure to pro-actively control forest-stocking have combined to create conditions that are ripe for catastrophic stand-replacing fires. California has more than 7,000,000 citizens living in wildland areas. In these areas of high urban wildland inter-mix, such as the Tahoe Basin, the risks to loss of life and property are immense and unacceptable.

Now is the time to implement an aggressive and extensive forest management program that integrates reduction of forest fuels through forest thinning,

removal of insect-killed trees and prescribed fire where feasible. Programs such as Tahoe Regreen provide a good start to address these issues. Collaborative efforts like the Quincy Library Group provide a more comprehensive long-term solution to the problem of maintaining forest health and safety.

As former Chief of the U.S. Forest Service Jack Ward Thomas stated after the disastrous 1994 fire season, "We cannot, in my opinion, simply step back and wait for 'nature' to take its course. I do not believe that what has happened this fire season is acceptable as a solution to the problem. These fires at this scale and intensity, are too hot, destructive, dangerous, and too ecologically, economically, aesthetically, and socially damaging to be tolerable."

*Above: The west side of Lake Tahoe, north of Emerald Bay. . . just a glimpse of the effects of drought, disease and insect infestation.*



# PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



## A Collaborative Conservation Strategy for California's Salmon and Steelhead

by CFA President David A. Bischel

The current and pending listing of various stocks and runs of coho salmon, steelhead trout, and chinook salmon as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) has enormous implications for all Californians; from the food we eat to the water we drink to the homes we build. As such, many of the major associations representing the natural resource owners, producers, and user groups in California recently initiated a voluntary effort to develop a collaborative conservation strategy to help recover California's depleted salmon and steelhead fisheries.

The initial collaborative partners include:  
Association of California Water Agencies  
California Building Industry Association  
California Cattleman's Association  
California Farm Bureau Federation  
California Forestry Association  
California Mining Association  
California State Association of Counties  
Forest Landowners of California  
Forest Resources Council

As a group, we are very excited about this commitment because it truly represents a "bottom-up" approach initiated by the "on-the-ground" stakeholders. Our goal is to develop a collaborative and comprehensive state-wide conservation strategy to restore and recover anadromous fish stocks to sustainable levels that will support a viable sport and commercial fishery, while assuring the viability of all other natural resource based industries.

We have built this effort on the belief that a process based on credible science, through systematic assessment and modeling, encourages voluntary efforts by the stakeholders, minimizes the need for additional costly prescriptive regulations, and ultimately maximizes the on-the-ground benefits derived from investments allocated to improve fisheries.

Once we got together, we began to realize the thousands of hours of human resources, and the millions of dollars of financial resources that are voluntarily being dedicated towards anadromous fisheries population enhancement and freshwater habitat improvement. Moreover, 75% of the land area within the range of coho in northern California is currently undergoing landscape planning and analysis, whether in the form of a Habitat Conservation Plan, or a Sustained Yield Plan as required by the California Forest Practice Rules, or part of the President's Northwest Forest Plan (Option 9). Many small forest landowners are also developing Non-Industrial Timber Management Plans that include ownership and watershed-wide environmental analysis.

In addition, current scientific analysis of the most up-to-date fish survey data and estimates for coho spawners indicate that coho salmon distribution in the north coast is more widely distributed than previously thought (20% more streams with coho present). Also with the curtailment of commercial fishing in 1994, and improved climatic and oceanic conditions of the last four years, there has been a general increasing trend in the number of adults returning to spawn, as well as an increase in the number of juvenile coho per mile of stream (three times more abundant). These are positive trends that we want to see continue permanently into the future by taking steps now to ensure the long-term sustainability of these fish populations.

On April 25, 1997, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) chose to list coho salmon as a threatened species pursuant to their authority under the ESA. Although we are disappointed that our collaborative effort was not sufficiently complete to play a role in this decision, we're optimistic that it will provide a significant contribution to recovery efforts and future listings. Following this listing decision, the Sacramento Bee published an editorial recognizing that the time is right to cooperate on a recovery strategy

## FEATURE STORY



### Western Forests Need Action Now

by R. Neil Sampson

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**The subject of forest health has become a particularly hot topic in the West, where 60% of the forests are federal. And, of course, it has become-like everything associated with federal forests-highly politicized and controversial. The result is a stalemate over what to do, and while the combatants argue, forest conditions deteriorate.**

In the decade between 1985 and 1994, 18 million acres have burned in the 11 western states, often in wildfires that are hotter and larger than normal. The Forest Service has spent over \$4 billion fighting fire in that time, and that doesn't count the billions of dollars spent by other federal, state and local agencies, or the cost of destroyed property and resources. Nor does it count post-fire flooding damages and continuing watershed restoration expenses. Sadly, however, the trend is far from over. At least 20-40 million acres are gearing up for big wildfires in the coming decades. Only smart, aggressive and effective treatment will save a significant portion from damage.

The most lasting damage from these fires will be the least visible. Trees will be killed, houses destroyed, even lives lost. Those are tragic and expensive losses. But where the fuel loads are excessively high, as is true on millions of acres, soils can be heated to the point of sterility. Extremely hot fires destroy both organic matter and nutrients in the soil; at some point the clay minerals are fused. With the vegetative cover removed and some soils made water-repellant, an ordinary rainstorm becomes an extraordinary event, causing severe soil erosion and flooding on already fire-damaged land. In many places, the future of the land is at risk. Topsoils that are lost, or turned to desert, will be worthless for generations, perhaps permanently.

The federal government has adopted a new policy position, and Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt has been promoting it. The policy recognizes the need to take action, and one of the long-term goals is to get these forests back into condition where fire behaves naturally. The way to reach that goal, in part, is to reintroduce fire into the forest. Fire reintroduction is supported by a broad array of scientists, foresters and conservationists. But it's not as easy as it sounds, and to

simply propose lighting fires on most western forests is irresponsible and destructive.

Researcher Wallace Covington of Northern Arizona University works to restore ponderosa pine forests through fire reintroduction. Covington reported in a recent study that, before fuel conditions were reduced to a "normal" level in order to burn safely, he removed 5,500 board feet of merchantable timber, and 58 tons of unmerchantable slash and duff from each acre! In northern California, forester Steve Jolley of Wheelabrator Shasta Energy Company estimated that 30-35 tons of material were removed per acre in a mixed conifer thinning operation. In Idaho, Leon Neuenschwander and I estimated that the 1994 wildfires on the Boise National Forest burned an average of 47 tons of fuel per acre across all areas of the fires. In the areas of high intensity, an estimated 80 tons per acre were consumed.

None of these can be construed as "average," because forest conditions vary so widely from place to place, but it is instructive to note that a prescribed fire - one designed to consume part of the dead material without getting hot enough to kill the large trees in the stand - would probably consume in the range of 10-15 tons of fuel per acre. If our goal is to create conditions where fires burn at tolerable intensities with acceptable mortalities, it may be necessary to remove 10 to 100 tons of excess material per acre from most western forests.

The problems with removing excess fuel from the forests are self-evident. At least half of that material is not suited for today's commercial markets, even as pulp chips. Without a thriving biomass energy-producing industry, there is no local market for wood fuels in most forest regions. Burning it in wildfires not only kills trees and cooks soils, but creates enormous air pollution

## FEATURE STORY

problems. Burning it in pits (as Covington did) still produces the air pollution problem. What he did at the scale of research is one thing, doing it on millions of acres is another.

So we face a major dilemma in the West. Even if there were markets - or acceptable disposal methods - for the surplus wood that threatens the land with super-hot fires, the political opposition to forest harvesting will halt or delay most proposed projects. But the wildfires won't wait for us to solve our economic or political problems. It is often pointed out that these forests took many decades, some a century or more, to build up

these enormous fuel loads. True, but that does not mean we have the same amount of time to remedy the situation. Those areas are terribly unstable, and likely to explode at the first confluence of weather and ignition. The task is enormous, and time is fleeting. If we lose these forests because we are too gridlocked to act, how will history judge our stewardship?

*Neil Sampson is President of The Sampson Group, Inc., an Alexandria, VA, natural resource consulting firm, and a Senior Fellow at American Forests, the nation's oldest citizens' conservation organization.*



L to R: Congressional Representatives Wally Herger, Wayne Gilchrist, Joe Skeen, Helen Chenoweth, John Duncan, Larry Combest, Thomas Delay and Roy Blunt.

## KARE 8th Annual Woods Tour

by Jim Ostrowski

Modern forest management tools such as controlled fire, thinning, and salvage were observed first-hand by eight congressional representatives on the 8th Annual KARE (Klamath Alliance for Resources and the Environment) Woods Tour, held May 3rd in McCloud, California.

Representatives observing methods used by professional land managers to improve the health of public and private forests included: House Majority Whip Thomas Delay (Texas); Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chair Joe Skeen (New Mexico); Forestry Subcommittee members from both Resources and Agriculture Committees: Helen Chenoweth (Idaho), John J. Duncan, Jr. (Tennessee), Larry Combest (Texas), Wayne T. Gilchrist (Maryland) and Roy Blunt (Missouri), along with KARE Co-Host Wally Herger (California).

Professional foresters, wildlife biologists and range managers led the tour. The

Congressmen were shown the "Valley of Death," one of the many examples of the failure of the President's Forest Plan policies which paralyzed the U.S. Forest Service from applying sound forest management

practices. The Congressmen were very pleased with the efforts of our public and private forest managers, and left with the knowledge that dedicated professionals are true stewards of this valuable resource.

*Jim Ostrowski is the Timberland Manager for Timber Products Co. in Mt. Shasta, California, and is Chairman of the KARE Woods Tour Committee.*

## 550 Years of Professional Forestry in Golden Memberships



Back L to R: Richard D. "Don" Cosens (Brownsville); Warren Carleton (Jackson); George Craig (Oakland); John C. "Jack" Dozier (North Fork); Jack Weddle (Petaluma). front L to R: George Grogan (Santa Rosa); Hayden "Jerry" Reinecker (Sacramento); Paul Zinke (Berkeley). Unable to attend: Eugene A. Drown (Sacramento); Gordon L. Watts (Carmel); Clinton "Clint" Phillip (Santa Rosa).

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American Foresters  
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# FOREST TALK



## CFA Interviews California Senator Tim Leslie

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*A Republican, Tim Leslie has represented the 1st Senate District which encompasses 13 northern California counties along the Sierra Nevada mountain range from the Oregon border to Mammoth Lakes, since 1991. Born in Ashland, Oregon and raised in southern California, Senator Leslie moved to northern California after earning a Bachelor's degree in Political Science from California State University, Long Beach, and a Master's degree in Public Administration from the University of Southern California. A former legislative aide, lobbyist, and real estate executive, Senator Leslie now serves as the Vice-Chair of the Appropriations and Judiciary Committees, and also serves on the Natural Resources and Wildlife Committee. As a lawmaker, Senator Leslie has fought against crime and drugs, and fought for protecting the families and communities who rely on forest resources for their livelihood, and has a reputation for prompt and effective constituent services in his district. Senator Leslie and his wife, Clydene have two grown children and presently reside in Carnelian Bay near Lake Tahoe.*

*CFA's Director of State Legislative Affairs Melinda Terry visited Senator Leslie in his office at the State Capitol to discuss the President's upcoming visit to Lake Tahoe, as well as federal and state issues affecting Leslie's district. The following excerpts are from that interview.*

*Terry:* President Clinton is planning a summit in your district in July regarding the forest health of the Tahoe Basin. If you were sitting across from the President, what would you tell him are your concerns for the health and safety of the forest and the people in your district? What solutions would you like to see his administration and the U.S. Forest Service implement in your district?

*Leslie:* The Sierra Nevada, including the area around Lake Tahoe where the President will be visiting, is a tinder keg of dead trees waiting to erupt into a holocaust. One of the biggest frustrations I've had as Senator is getting the people to understand the necessity of removing the dead trees so we have some ability to control the big fires - and also to provide the level of safety necessary for our fire fighters. It's an issue people often overlook.

Yes, the President is coming to Lake Tahoe. Allegedly, he is there to look at the issues surrounding the Basin. From what we understand, most, if not all of his time will be spent on the Nevada side of the lake— we're having trouble even getting him over to the California side. His time will be spent primarily with the members of the Nevada Legislature and their Governor, who are Democrats. From what we can tell, there is no planned involvement of local, California legislators with responsibility for the area.

What would I say to the President if I were sitting across the table from him? I would tell him about the fire danger and the urgent need to eliminate the dead trees in the Basin. I would warn him that a significant fire could destroy the water quality of our lake. I would explain the bureaucratic quagmire that we find ourselves in - with so many competing agencies with overlapping responsibility.

*Terry:* Do you think solutions will be discussed at the President's Summit?

*Leslie:* Well, everyone is anxiously awaiting for the President to arrive - and hoping for a big pile of federal money to fix all their problems. Realistically, I think it would be appropriate for the federal government to help with some water quality and erosion control projects. I think the Lake Tahoe Basin is a national treasure, and a legitimate issue for federal involvement.

*Terry:* The California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection is already expressing warnings of an unprecedented fire season. The administration concurs with the need to thin and reduce forest fuels from federal lands. Yet the administration has delayed implementation of the CAL OWL EIS. For the past three years you have monitored the U.S. Forest Service as it has developed the EIS, provided public review of a draft EIS, engaged over 4,000 participants, offered to

## FOREST TALK

republish the amended document as a revised draft and shared data with the Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project science team. Now the administration still suppresses the EIS and has not formed the federal advisory team it promised last September to evaluate the report. What advice do you offer citizens in communities faced with high fire risk?

*Leslie:* We have a federal Forest Service agency that says one thing and does another. It seems to be so caught up in political correctness that it is stymied from being able to take any action. In the Lassen, Plumas, and Tahoe National Forests, there was a study done about what to do to protect the forests from fire. It called for creating substantial fuel breaks on the ridge tops and in the basin. This study was signed off by every level of professional leadership within the three national forests. As a member of the Western States Legislative Forestry Task Force (Task Force), I went back to Washington, D.C. and appeared before Congress. I asked them to adopt the study and warned them about the catastrophic fire that's about to take place. And I warned them about what experts have told me— forestry experts --that over the next 50 years, we can expect major fires to burn so hot and frequent as to destroy the soil up the east side out of Nevada, right up into the Sierra. That's what we have to look forward to. I can't believe anyone in their right mind would want to do that to our beautiful Sierra. But that is the result of the policy direction that they've chosen.

This year, as President of the Task Force, I will present this issue to the members. I'm quite certain that my fellow legislators from around the west will join me in urging the federal government to get this study off the shelf and into action. There's no more research to be done - the science is all there, the evidence is all there, the facts and figures are all there. These studies have shown that we can increase our yield out of the forest. Even the amount that they're going to allow as a result of this study is far below what it could be and should be. This is just brutal politics that is stopping the solution. If people want to further politically manipulate the results of this study for their own personal agendas, then I don't know what we can do until we can replace the Executive Branch and have an opportunity for an administration that is interested in balancing the needs of all of the species.

*Terry:* In response to the listing of the California spotted owl in 1990, and pursuant to President Clinton's request for communities to develop local solutions based on consensus and cooperation, your constituents have been the first to form a partnership of labor, environmental, and industry representatives in order to find a local balanced, compromised solution to the forest management crisis afflicting northern California,

known as the Quincy Library Group (QLG). Congressman Wally Herger has introduced legislation this year to implement QLG's long-term forest management plan which seeks to protect forests, minimize the risk of wildfires and maximize timber yields. Recently, the U.S. Forest Service and the Clinton administration seemed to have rescinded their support of legislation pending in Congress to implement QLG's plan, and have expressed their intent to implement it through administrative actions instead. You have always been a supporter of QLG's efforts to find local solutions to the crisis in our national forests. Have you talked with Congress or the administration on this issue lately, and what are your thoughts on allowing QLG's plan to become reality?

*Leslie:* I have supported the Quincy Library Group's efforts because it is a coming together of all the stakeholders around the community to find solutions. They've come up with some methods which can produce results. The Quincy Library Group has done this out of self-preservation. And so, in my mind it's good that a community took action, because you must take action yourself to make something happen. But it is wrong that community after community has to fight the same battle. How many communities can go to Washington and try to have a special law written just so one area can have the right to remove a few more trees? We should have a forest policy based on sound science and common sense.

It's pretty interesting - in Plumas County, before the big cutbacks, the County received about \$2.8 million a year from forest receipts, and that money was used for roads and schools for that community, and appropriately so. Next year they anticipate receipts of about \$300,000. That is an unbelievably huge reduction in the monies that go to provide these basic services.

*Terry:* Some of our readers would be interested in the education bill for Plumas County that you recently had in the Education Committee. What does the bill do and what is its current status?

*Leslie:* In California law we have an extra financial provision for small rural school districts if the district is less than 2,500 students. Also, over time, California has urged school districts to consolidate, and the school districts in Plumas County have done just that. Now there is one unified school district in Plumas County with a total population of 3,500 - over the limit to be able to receive small rural school district funding. In the past, the funding didn't matter because the timber receipts were coming in. But when the receipts were cut, the school district became financially strapped and there was nothing they could do to increase their revenues. They decided that they had to apply for



## FOREST TALK

disunification and create separate school districts. Even though the elected officials in Plumas County were willing to do that, they had to ask permission of the State Department of Education which denied their request. They're in a classic catch-22. They can't get money because the federal government has reduced timber harvesting - they've cooperated with the state to unify - now when they try to deunify they're not allowed to do so. The school system is in great jeopardy. My legislation would allow a school district, given the circumstances that they're in, to qualify for the small rural school district funding, even though they are over the 2,500 population count. The bill has passed the Education Committee, gone on to the Appropriations Committee and now is in the suspense file. It's a long way to the Governor's desk, but they're desperate for it, so I'll continue to fight for this legislation.

*Terry:* You mentioned your role as the current President of the Western States Legislative Forestry Task Force. Can you explain what the Task Force is and who serves on it? As President, what are the issues you intend the Task Force to focus on and the goals that can realistically be achieved during your term?

*Leslie:* The Task Force is made up of two members of the Assembly and two members of the Senate from California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Alaska, Montana, as well as representatives from British Columbia and Alberta. The idea is to have an equal number of Republicans and Democrats, but it's up to each state to select their own members. Mainly we want people who really care about western issues to be involved. When we speak as a united voice, we can have more impact than we have individually. The U.S. Forest Service always sends regional foresters and higher level people to our meetings, and they keep us up-to-date. The unity and the influence of our organization is growing. We all bring something to the table, and I think we can make a difference.

*Terry:* Does the Task Force actually try to lobby and testify before Congressional members and does it have a staff?

*Leslie:* Yes, we have staff located in Idaho that assist us with all of our various efforts. We just had our meeting in Washington, D.C. where we met with Senators Kempthorne, Craig, Stevens, and Congresswoman Chenoweth - members testified on wilderness management before Chenoweth's subcommittee. We also had meetings with Congressmen Wally Herger, Don Young, Mike Crapo, and Richard Pombo, as well as Senator Frank Murkowski and Undersecretary for Resources and Environment Jim Lyons.

*Terry:* The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) listed the coho salmon as threatened on April 25, 1997. A decision on steelhead is expected in August of this year and chinook in the spring. NMFS has accepted Oregon's Coho Strategy as a recovery plan for anadromous fish which provides significant flexibility for landowners as long as they are in compliance with their state's plan. Governor Wilson and several state legislators have introduced proposals to find programs and projects to assess, monitor and restore anadromous fish populations, forming a management plan for California's fish as well. CFA has also been working with landowners and resource producers on a collaborative statewide conservation strategy that is based on cooperative, voluntary, on-the-ground measures which is information-driven and recognizes existing regulations, statutes and conservation efforts. Do you think that there is an opportunity for the Governor, the Legislature and NMFS to work with the various stakeholders to develop and implement a conservation strategy for California that addresses existing listed aquatic species and precludes the necessity for future listings?

*Leslie:* There is always the opportunity for the government to work with stakeholders. However, I find it rare that it happens on a meaningful basis. As you know, more and more of the inter-governmental activity is being done with the Memorandum of Understanding device-- where you get powerful federal and state agencies coming together, signing an agreement that literally takes each one of their respective grants of authority and expands it to a unified grant of authority - which was probably never intended by the Congress that created them. It seems to me that this is what many in the federal government consider getting together with stakeholders-- getting all of the federal and state bureaucrat agencies that are involved in an issue, putting them together and combining their powers -- now all the "stakeholders" have been involved. When in fact, the true stakeholders, the people that own land and pay taxes have had no say about it. Unfortunately, whole schemes and strategies can be developed using the MOU, giving powers to federal and state agencies that can bring any individual citizen to his knees. Involving stakeholders is when you include people who really know what they're talking about-- who live it, breathe it, survive because of it. Involving stakeholders means joining with them at the table, sitting down and having an honest open discussion and trying to come up with solutions that work for everybody.

*Terry:* The Legislature plays an important role in the hopeful recovery of salmon and will need to provide some of the funding to allow for the assessment, monitoring and other on-the-ground restoration

## FOREST TALK

activities. Do you think funding of these type of projects can happen this year?

*Leslie:* What I've observed is that if you can provide an incentive for people to cooperate with the appropriate governmental agencies to accomplish a goal, they're eager to do just that. I doubt there's anybody living near one of our streams or rivers who wouldn't be anxious, if given the scientific expertise and the necessary financial resources, to cooperate with any wildlife or resource based agency to help improve fisheries, wildlife habitat and improve environmental concerns in general. They want to do this.

You mention funding - I would say if the government thinks its going to come in with a little bit of money, which will always be inadequate, impose its will on every landowner and run roughshod over them, it's not going to work. But if the government comes in as a partner and really wants to work, cooperate, and develop a level of trust with property owners in these sensitive areas, I think they'll find tremendous cooperation.

*Terry:* We've focused quite a bit on several federal issues affecting your district and the State. Looking at the State Legislature, do you think that the new business, resource and forestry laws that may be passed this year will be beneficial or detrimental to the forest products industry?

*Leslie:* It's hard to predict the Legislature because the turnover is so great, that by the time you figure out the voting patterns of a member they're termed out of office. It's still true that most legislators come from urban areas and don't have a full understanding of the dynamics of a resource-based economy. With the current climate, I can't imagine that a legislative package will help the forest products industry. We are unfortunately playing a defensive game, trying to ward off unsatisfactory solutions for problems that many believe don't even exist.

It is true that the best defense is a good offense. The California Forestry Association will be presenting positive, common sense legislative proposals. Proposals that I will either author or co-author, or as a member of the Senate Resources Committee, will be voting for. Unfortunately, I can almost predict that unless they're so watered down as to be just a little baby step towards common sense, they'll be defeated in committee. So, our best offense is educating them, if they'll listen.



# California Under Fire:





## GUEST EDITORIAL



### California Under Fire: A Prescription for a Fire Safe Future

by CDF Director Richard Wilson

In California, the severity of fires and the cost and losses associated with them have been increasing over the past two decades. Increasing fuel loads in our fire prone landscapes create situations where existing suppression resources are not always enough to stop fires during initial attack. Large and costly fires do not respect political boundaries and cut across areas of local, state and federal fire suppression responsibility. These fires show no signs of abating without significant interventions to reduce fire risks. Thus, we must begin to take the coordinated actions needed to minimize the costs and losses that wildland fires impose on taxpayers and citizens.

Twenty-five years ago, a series of devastating fires in southern California led to the development of FIRESCOPE as a means to coordinate the actions and resources of all the major fire agencies when catastrophic fires threaten large areas and multiple jurisdictions. We believe it is time to broaden the approach to cooperation on fire prevention and programs to reduce fuel loads, an approach we call "prefire management." Only by expanding the scope of cooperation and coordination will we be able to reduce the overall costs and losses from fire. In addition to the major fire and disaster agencies, a successful new prefire management approach must also include the private sector (which bears most of the burden of lost assets) and the environmental regulatory agencies with responsibilities for air, water and habitat quality.

From June 24 through 26, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection (CDFFP), the Society of American Foresters, and the Fire Safe Council will convene a summit, "California Under Fire: A Prescription for a Fire Safe Future," to address our shared problem of increasing risks of catastrophic fires. The summit will address issues including forest health, areas with strict air quality and habitat concerns, extremely costly fires in the wildland-urban interface, and the potential for alternative approaches to fuels reduction such as biomass utilization for power production or ethanol production.

The summit will highlight tools such as the California Fire Plan that can be applied at a regional level to identify the most effective interventions to reduce fire risks. The summit will also highlight the importance of locally developed initiatives to address fire risks across different jurisdictions. We can integrate into new institutional arrangements the positive lessons that are emerging from fuels reduction projects promoted by groups such as the Quincy Library Group, the Municipal Water District-Lake Matthews Project, the Placer County Resource Conservation District, and the High Sierra Resource Conservation and Council.

The goal is to develop new approaches that build upon the strengths of all the major parties and lead to real actions on the ground. As a compliment to the existing FIRESCOPE system, we need a coordinated fire policy that also covers presuppression and prevention activities. California cannot afford different approaches that follow individual jurisdictions because fires will never follow political lines. We must all work together to develop approaches that address areas where fire risks and potential costs are high and can be reduced through appropriate prefire planning and projects.

We can never accurately predict all the impacts of large catastrophic fires or the effects of planned activities to reduce fire risks. But if we do not take the initiative to mitigate these impacts and to reduce these risks, all we will know is that we will fall further behind the increasing problem of fire across the state. It is imperative that we move beyond talk to initiate and learn from actions. To assure that we can learn from our actions, we need to develop research programs to assess the effectiveness of prefire programs; we must not allow uncertainty over outcomes to delay us from any action.

The mandate of CDFFP demands that we take a leadership role in promoting the development of a California fire policy that is regionally relevant, partners with local stakeholders, and involves all the major state, federal and local agencies. My efforts in organizing the "California Under Fire" summit is one



## GUEST EDITORIAL

part of this leadership. If we all make a commitment to be leaders and to move forward on the issues I've discussed here, then the summit will be the beginning of a more comprehensive, and more successful prescription for a fire safe future for California.

*Richard Wilson was appointed director of the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection by Gov. Pete Wilson in September, 1991.*

## GUEST EDITORIAL



### Breaking the Gridlock Over Forest Health and Forest Management: The End of the Forest Wars?

By U.S. Representative Wally Herger

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For more than 15 years, environmentalists and members of the forest products industry have waged war over managing western forests. And, like all wars, this conflict has its own share of victims.

The victims of the forest management debate include schools left with uncertain funding.

Twenty-five percent of all timber sales receipts are promised by mandate to fund local education and county road programs. When sales decline, so does education.

Other victims are communities faced with extreme unemployment rates, and an environment clogged with unhealthy forests.

In 1993, Bill Coates, Plumas County Supervisor from Quincy, California, took up the challenge of breaking the gridlock over forest management by arranging a meeting with environmental attorney, Michael Jackson and Sierra Pacific Industries forester Tom Nelson.

"We met in the local library because we knew we couldn't yell at each other," Jackson later said. Soon the group invited other individuals interested in finding a solution to environmental gridlock, and the Quincy Library Group (QLG) was formed.

QLG is now a coalition of local environmentalists, forest products industry representatives, public officials and concerned citizens who meet each month at the Quincy Library to discuss ways to improve local forest health. At the heart of their discussions is the overriding threat that fire will destroy the forests before any action can be taken.

Fire is the single greatest threat to western forests.

In 1996, the United States suffered its worst fire season in history. Nationwide, more than 5.8 million acres burned with fire suppression costs exceeding \$2 million

per day at the height of the fire season. In California, uncontrollable wildfires whipped through Yosemite National Park, threatened the giant redwoods of Sequoia National Park, and incinerated tens of thousands of acres of old-growth, salmon spawning grounds and critical wildlife habitat in the Mendocino National Forest.

The cause of this fire threat is an unnatural accumulation of vegetation on western forest floors. The United States Forest Service (USFS) estimates forests are 82% denser than in 1928. Dense undergrowth, combined with increasingly taller layers of intermediate vegetation has turned western forests into deadly time-bombs. Fire quickly climbs up dense vegetation like a ladder until it tops out at the uppermost, or crown level of the forest and races out of control as a catastrophic fire.

Because of their high speed and intense heat, these "crown fires" leave an almost sterile environment in their wake. After a crown fire, nothing is left behind; no trees, no wildlife, and no habitat with few micro-organisms left to rebuild the soil.

Ironically, this deadly buildup of vegetation is blamed on decades of aggressive fire suppression and modern hands-off management practices. Until recently, the USFS considered fire suppression a great asset to its land management process.

Fire, however, once served an integral purpose in natural forest conditions by clearing out dense underbrush. Fire history studies show low intensity fires cleaned forestlands at a frequency of every five to 30 years. Since fire was taken out of the management picture, our forests have begun to suffer.

The question isn't IF the forests will burn, but WHEN, and at WHAT INTENSITY.

Through open and frank discussion, QLG put aside differences and developed a scientific-based plan for



## GUEST EDITORIAL

managing local forests. The QLG turned to the best science available, including the recently released Sierra Nevada Ecosystem Project (SNEP) Report which defines, among other things, the elements of a healthy forest. QLG implements many of these elements through the following goals: reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire; protect environmentally sensitive areas; implement critical watershed, stream and water quality restoration; and provide economic stability for communities dependent on the wood products industry.

These goals are accomplished through a five-year pilot project established by legislation I have introduced affecting three of California's threatened forests. HR 858, the Quincy Library Group Forest Recovery and Economic Stability Act of 1997, implements a strategic system of defensible fuel profile zones including shaded fuel breaks that contain fires in the more manageable forest understory. This gives fire suppression personnel the ability to contain fires before they get out of hand. The proposal also implements uneven-aged forest management prescriptions utilizing individual tree selection and thinnings, and group selection to achieve optimal forest health by creating an all-age, multi-story, fire-resilient forest.

The benefits of the plan not only improve over-all watershed quality, but allow reintroduction of prescribed burns.

More importantly, however, HR 858 provides America with an opportunity to break environmental gridlock and put an end to the forest wars by interjecting local voices. This legislation provides a unique opportunity to test a locally-conceived forest management plan and establishes a model for replacing polarized political posturing in western forests with cooperative solutions that really work.

The future sustainability of our communities and our forests is dependent upon consensus-based solutions like the QLG proposal. By putting aside their differences, environmentalists, industry, local governments and Congress can set an example for the rest of the nation to follow.





# **The Growing Fire Problem in California**

**The growing population**

**The growing number of people moving into wildland areas**

**The growing number of fire starts**

**The growing demand for services**

**The growing cost of suppression**

**The growing losses due to fires**

**The growing charges against the E-Fund**

**The growing difference between the allocated and needed budget**

**The growing fuels that, until modified, will assure a continually . . .**

**Growing fire problem in California**

*California Fire Strategies Committee*





# Hold That Drip Torch Mr. Babbitt!

By Bill Keye

Right . . . overstocked forest with an unbroken fuel ladder: 1988 (note the stump at right)

Bottom Left . . . this is the same view of the forest after eight growing seasons: 1996 (again note the stump in the right corner)

The President's upcoming Lake Tahoe Event will be an opportunity to focus on the ecosystem health of the Tahoe Basin and Sierra Nevada mountains. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is pushing prescribed fire as the primary tool for restoring overstocked western forests to a more healthy condition. But fire can be an angry and disobedient servant, especially in sensitive areas like Tahoe which have high fuel loading, air quality concerns, and many expensive homes. A better way to restore nature's balance is to mechanically thin first, then consider breaking out the matches.

There is wide agreement that the forests of the Sierra are extensively overstocked. The main culprit is a century of aggressive fire

exclusion. While Smokey Bear's intentions were the best, the result has been an ecological disaster we are only beginning to appreciate. Starved of periodic low intensity fires, what were once open forest stands are now more commonly dense thickets of stagnant, dead and dying trees. The result are less resilient forest ecosystems, at escalating risk for catastrophic fire. Without action to aggressively reduce stand densities and fuel loading, forest health in the Basin and elsewhere in the Sierra will continue to decline.

Already at work on the problem is California's unique biomass energy industry. In fact, mechanized thinning of overstocked natural stands has been taking place in the Sierra for over a decade, since the first





## MECHANIZED THINNING

biomass-fired cogeneration facilities came on line. Spawned largely as a result of the push to promote renewable energy sources during the 1970s, the industry currently has an infrastructure of 40 plants, representing a capital investment of \$2.5 billion and a generating capacity of 775 megawatts. This output surpasses that of all other states combined. Employing over 2,000 people, California's biomass energy sector has created beneficial uses for forest, agricultural and urban wastes that otherwise would be disposed of in less environmentally responsible ways; such as in landfills or open burning.

A typical biomass thinning removes the smaller, less healthy trees, while providing more favorable growing conditions for the

larger, more vigorous ones. Modifying dense "ladder fuels" is a key factor in making thinned stands less susceptible to destruction by wildfire.

The benefits of biomass forestry have been dramatic. Growth has been returned to stagnant stands, and wildfire risk has been reduced. As demand for lumber products has increased, the smaller diameter trees typically removed in a thinning are finding utilization as small logs for sawmills. Chips for paper and biomass cogeneration are also common products. High utilization leaves the site clean, without a slash buildup.

What happens when a wildfire races into a thinned area is usually very gratifying to

both forest managers and nature lovers. In a speech at Boise State University earlier this year, Secretary Babbitt described witnessing such an event last summer in northern Arizona: "We fought fire ignited by a lightning strike in a dense mixed stand of ponderosa, fir and aspen, that quickly rose up fuel ladders and escalated into a stand-replacing inferno that incinerated the entire landscape.... The next day, several miles away and down the slope, I worked the same fire where it had swept into pure ponderosa stands that already had been thinned by the Forest Service back in the 1970s. Here the fire 'lay down' like a pet dog and moved as a ground fire, cleaning out ground fuel and young pine saplings, leaving the larger trees scorched at the base but with crowns intact to continue growing."

So hold that driptorch, Mr. Babbitt! Prescribed fire has an important role to play, but in Tahoe and elsewhere in the West, carefully implemented thinnings are the proper first step in restoring and maintaining our forest ecosystems.

With a track record including several hundred thousand acres of forest thinned since 1983, California's biomass energy industry can help.

*Bill Keye is a Registered Professional Forester with Wheelabrator Shasta Energy Company in Redding, California.*

Bottom Right . . . mechanized thinning of overstocked natural stands has been taking place in the Sierra for over a decade





*The wildfire  
problem is a forest  
health problem.  
Our forests have  
become dangerous  
tinder boxes filled  
with decaying  
overstocked trees.*

*Management, not  
preservation, is  
the solution!*

*Areas of conifer mortality  
overlaid on satellite imagery  
of the Lake Tahoe Basin.*

- Very High Tree Mortality
- High Tree Mortality
- Moderate Tree Mortality

(California Forest Health, Past & Present, Sept. 1994, U.S.D.A. Forest Service)

